



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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D.C. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DIRECTOR AND PHYSICIANS RECEIVE SMALLPOX VACCINATION

Smallpox Vaccinations Conducted At Local Health Clinic

(Washington, D.C.) Mr. James A. Buford, Director, Department of Health (DOH), was one of the first DOH officials to receive the smallpox vaccination this morning at the department's immunization clinic in Northwest DC. "This historic event is important because it helps us to build capacity in our on-going effort to protect our Nation's Capital from a bioterrorist smallpox attack," said Mr. Buford.

Mr. Buford volunteered for the vaccination as part of the District's smallpox vaccination program geared towards preparing public health officials for smallpox response. "This voluntary process is a way to build the appropriate safeguards for our city to effectively manage an outbreak in its early stage," said Mr. Buford.

Today's clinic served as the pilot for DOH officials who will go out to hospitals and health care facilities and vaccinate others. Other physicians vaccinated today include Dr. Daniel Lucey, Dr. Jeff Elting and Dr. Walter Faggett. "These individuals represent the dedication and devotion of public health to protect the citizens of the District," said DOH's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Michael S.A. Richardson, who performed today's vaccinations. "Additional volunteers from within the DOH and local hospitals who make-up smallpox response teams will be vaccinated within the coming weeks."

While the probability of an intentional release of smallpox virus remains low, it is imperative that the District prepares those who would be the first called in the event of a smallpox attack. If an actual smallpox outbreak occurred, DOH officials say they would respond by either providing vaccine, investigating potential cases or providing care to those infected.

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The DOH Smallpox Vaccination Plan calls for the vaccination of nearly 300 public health and hospital rapid response teams from each of the nine acute care hospitals in the District. Participation remains voluntary and those vaccinated went through a series of medical screenings and consultation to ensure their ability to be vaccinated. Today's volunteers will be monitored carefully and will return for a seven-day follow-up.

Currently, there is no known case of smallpox disease. There has not been a report of smallpox disease since 1978. Only public health, and hospital personnel have been recommended to take the smallpox vaccine. The smallpox vaccine is not recommended, or available for the general public. However, if a case of smallpox should occur, this recommendation would likely change.

The Department of Health will conduct smallpox community awareness forums throughout the month of March. The first forum will be held on Thursday, March 6 at YMCA Anthony Bowen beginning at 7:00 p.m. For more information, please call 202.442.9196, or log-on to www.bioterrorism.dc.gov.

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